

## Because We Both Won by UnintendedTrustfall

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** He already missed early application, Insomnia, Nightmares, Past Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler, Post-Season/Series 02, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Sleep Deprivation, Steve-centric, but he's sure as shit gonna try another admissions essay, migraines

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**Summary:**

Turns out the infamous Northern game and grandfather's war story admissions essay actually meant something. Steve tries to cope with heartbreak, self worth, and the fact that he keeps having to fight monsters with a bat.

Set after 2x09.

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

Comment what you think so I can get motivated to write more please. Unless you think it's shit, then I can also stop

It was 3 AM on a Sunday night. Or-- Monday morning, Steve guessed, if you wanna get technical about it. And he was sitting there at his desk with what had to be a dozen crumpled up drafts of his attempts at admissions' essays and a fresh sheet of paper sitting blank, half an inch beneath his frustrated, trembling pen.

SCREEEEEEEEEE!

He dropped his pen, already on his feet and reaching for the old hockey stick in his closet before he realized what he was doing. But the noise came again and he recognized it was a fox this time. And not a Demogorgan. And he sat back down.

His heart was hammering like it did when he woke up from the nightmares. Which incidentally was how he came to be killing time writing another college essay anyway. And as he ran a shaky hand down his face and then through his hair, he realized that he was not okay.

Maybe Nancy and Jonathan were okay, because they didn't make each other pretend or lie to each other-- as far as Steve knew-- and Nancy deserved to be with someone who made her happy. So maybe when Steve had told her, '*it's okay, Nance... it okay*', he hadn't been lying.

He didn't say that *he* was okay.

He'd thought about channeling it into a college essay but he knew they'd turn out just as bad as the old ones. The best one he'd written had been shit and he knew it and Nancy knew it but it had been the most from the heart. It was just like everything else from his heart: behind a facade.

The infamous, disconnected, disjointed, poorly structured essay about his grandfather winning the war and him winning the Northern game had been a facade.

The game against Northern had been the closest comparison he could think of to how he'd felt when he'd first fought the Demogorgan.

Northern was the best high school team on this side of Indiana. The guys were big, they were scary as hell, and they *never* lost.

And when Thompson had sprained his ankle and Steve had gotten subbed in and even though he was terrified and had never actually played these giant, Northern assholes, he went in and he won.

And that felt like a pretty good comparison to him.

And on top of that, for a little flavoring, he'd tried to tie it to how his grandfather who'd done the same thing-- fought a big, terrifying enemy when he'd never fought anything... anyone else in his life before, and he'd won.

Honestly, if Steve was a better writer and he'd been able to include his first run in with the Demogorgan, he should've gotten into any college just based on that smooth, three-way parallel.

But he couldn't do it then, and he couldn't do it now, so he'd just have to come up with something else.

But that was really, really hard considering how regularly the Demogorgan haunted his dreams and his sleep-deprived, waking mind.

He was paranoid and tired and his ribs still twinged from where Billy had kicked them in a month ago and his heart still twinged from where Nancy had broken it a month ago.

But that wasn't her fault.

Just like his shit essay wasn't her fault.

She deserved someone who didn't hide behind facades and expect her to do the same. He might be able to hide from his absentee parents

and his slipping grades and his uncertain future behind movies and parties and sex but Barb's death was not something he should've ever told Nancy to hide from. It wasn't the same. And he should've known that.

If he hadn't hidden his anxiety over the Demogorgan that half-assedly fueled his shit admissions' essay and actually talked to Nancy about what they'd faced at the Byers' house, they might've related about it.

If he'd told her that he'd had nightmares then, like he had nightmares now or that he'd felt like he'd actually done something right when he'd popped that slimy mouthed motherfucker in the face with a nailbat, she might've stayed.

Because at least he'd be being honest with her.

At least he wouldn't be hiding from the horrors and then later telling her to do the same.

And now he couldn't hide anymore and the ache in his heart and his ribs and his head and his eyes were all proof that this had happened and it wasn't going away.

And no number of shitty analogies to the Demogorgan that he could write into college essays would replace actual, human empathy to deal with this trauma that Nancy could've and probably would've given him.

He could've really listened to her and she could've really listened to him and they could've gotten through it together instead of just shoving it under the rug.

But it was too late. He'd already told her to pretend that they were just dumb teenagers.

But hey, maybe this thirteenth essay attempt would be the lucky one.

Stranger things have happened.

## 2. Chapter 2

*Describe an experience where you took a leadership role. What hardships did you face? How did you handle them?*

*I had never babysat before in my life. But one weekend, my girlfriend ex-girlfriend had to help her friend with a family emergency and I stepped up to watch her little brother and his three friends.*

That seemed normal enough. Technically, the Byers' *had* been having a family emergency. That emergency just happened to be that Jonathan's little brother was possessed by some demon or some shit from the Upside Down.

Still a family emergency though.

*Babysitting is tough, especially when the kids you're taking care of are old enough to decide they want to go out searching for things in the woods and young enough to be convinced they're searching for monsters.*

Nailed it.

*I'll admit that I gave the kids more power than I should have initially: agreeing to take them to one of their friends' houses when nobody was home, even though one of those kids' older brother didn't want them to be there. Babysitting was new to me and it was my leniency that was the cause of Problem #1: an angry older brother. But I am a problem solver, so I dealt with this situation accordingly.*

*When we arrived at the kids' friend's house without notifying the one kid's older brother, he showed up looking for her. She had told me that when her brother was angry, he got violent so I told her to stay inside so that I could go mediate the situation.*

Steve snorted at himself. Yeah. He sure mediated that problem. It only took his four cracked ribs, nasty concussion, and Max taking the situation-- and the bat-- into her own hands to put a stop to Billy's constant harassment.

He hesitated, considering whether or not to include Max's forced act

of self defense because of his weakness and then realized his story was quickly falling apart. Because after he'd failed to protect the kids against Billy as he lay in a bloody, unconscious heap beneath Billy's still pummeling fists, they'd then kidnapped him, illegally and dangerously driven Billy's car, and then after that they'd gone down to some tunnels to commit arson to kill a real, for-real monster.

So how the hell was he gonna spin that?

He dropped his pen on his desk and pushed the draft away. He leaned back in his chair, tilting his head back running his hands through his hair. This was what always happened when he thought he was going to accomplish something-- academically-speaking, at least: he would start off inspired, believing this time was gonna be the time he changed things. But then he'd hit a snag or a straight up brick wall, and it would start to fall apart, and he'd give up on it.

*Can I mark on it?*

Nancy had tried to help him before. But they weren't together now. What reason did she have to help him edit this horrible attempt at an essay now? She had her own work and a new boyfriend now. And he'd already lied to her and hidden from her the extent of his anxieties and inability to move on from the Demogorgan. So why should she listen to him now?

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"How was the party?"

Steve blinked and turned his head, regaining his bearings because for a moment he forgot where he was.

As he took in the fluorescent lighting and loud, indecipherable voices all around him he recognized the cafeteria. And he was sitting alone at the end of a table in the back with his sunglasses on. And it was Tommy who was taunting him. Shocker.

Steve pushed his sunglasses up onto his head and said,

"Killer. Now do you want something or can I go back to--"

"Staring at everyone by yourself like a creep?" Carol offered.

"Napping." Steve lied flatly, "But thanks for thinking of me, guys."

Tommy rolled his eyes and he and Carol walked off to a different table.

Steve dropped his glasses back down because now that he'd been jolted back to the present he remembered that his head hurt like hell and this god awful school lighting was not helping.

"Are you okay?"

*God, who was it now?*

He glanced up and his heart skipped. He pushed his glasses back up and accidentally pushed them off onto the table. He sat up as nonchalantly as he could but Nancy could see right through his whole 'natural' act. Much better than she'd seen through it before. But she'd been dealing with her own guilt and trauma then.

Still, Steve lied.

"I'm fine. Hungover."

Nancy eyed him dubiously and said,

"You look like you haven't slept."

"Parties run late."

"And wired."

"Coke's one helluva drug."

"Steve--"

"*Nancy*. I'm fi--"

Steve trailed off as he his headache throbbing painfully behind his eyes. It was getting so bad it was making him nauseous. And those fucking *lights*--

"Steve?"

He couldn't even care that he was in public and in front of Nancy right now. He had his hands over his eyes, trying to block out the light, sinking his head towards the table.

"Are you-- do you get migraines?"

Steve shook his head, his eyes still covered.

Nancy picked up his glasses and handed them to him. He put them back on and she took his arm, pulling him to his feet and out of the cafeteria.

She led him to a dark empty classroom and she closed the door. He sat down against the back wall, away from the windows. She followed him and started searching through her bag. She came out with a bottle of Tylenol and offered it to him.

He took two and swallowed them, leaning his head back. Waiting for the pain to subside.

They sat there in silence for a long while and finally Nancy broke it.

"You haven't been sleeping, have you?"

Steve sighed, shaking his head he pulled off his glasses again.

"I uh... I can't. I keep waking up."

"Is this about graduating--?"

"It's about the Demogorgan."

Nancy opened her mouth to speak and stopped. She hesitated and said,

"When did this start happening?"

"Last year."

She froze, looking something like shocked and guilty and betrayed.

"*Last year*?! " She repeated, her voice rising and he waved her off slightly because his head still throbbed, "You should have talked to



me!" She said, quieter now.

"I know," he said, scrubbing at his aching eyes, "I know, it was just... I don't know, I felt stupid. I felt like I should be over it... I mean it was just the one time I saw it then."

He knew it was also because Nancy had had real problems then-- and now, come to think of it-- that Barb was dead and no one knew. And real, normal problems like mourning a friend and survivor's guilt all topped his bullshit bad dreams about monsters. He felt like a little kid.

"Have you had nightmares this whole time?" Nancy said softly.

Steve looked at her almost apologetically and said,

"No. No, not the whole time... it happened more... in the beginning... and then they sorta went away... and then they came back every once in a while, I guess that summer... when we went out by my pool again... they kinda came back... and then after this time... they're just sorta back again."

Nancy nodded, biting her lip. Her hand was on Steve's knee and he hadn't noticed it until now. He shrank away, feeling stupid again.

Nancy noticed. She sat up straighter and said,

"Steve, you need to talk to somebody about this. You can talk to me or... or... Hopper or Joyce, but you've gotta talk to somebody!"

Steve laughed hollowly at her, climbing to his feet. She followed.

"About what? It already happened."

"This sounds like Post-Traumatic Stress, Steve." Nancy said plainly.

"Post-Traumatic'..."

"It's like--"

"Yeah, shell shock, I know, Nance, my grandpa was really fucked up by it after the war but this is not that!" He said and a horrible

realization seemed to be dawning over Nancy's face and he wanted to be anywhere but there.

He'd told her too much. She was gonna blame herself or something stupid like that and he knew it wasn't her fault because he hadn't been honest with her. And he hadn't been there for her when she needed it. He'd tried to distract her. Just like he'd tried to distract himself. And it wasn't working anymore.

"You..." she began, her voice trembling.

"Nance, no, I know what you're--"

"Your essay..."

"Nance, c'mon, don't--"

And she had her arms around him and she was holding him. It felt silly-- he usually held her. But it was kind of nice, in a way. Comforting. She held him close, standing on her toes to do it so he wouldn't have to bend down so much. She was rubbing his back gently, soothing and sweet.

Finally he said softly,

"It was a shit essay, though."

"Oh, god awful."

He laughed. And she laughed. And they stayed there holding each other until the bell rang.